

NETWORKING

USACE Small Business Conference
Arlington, VA

December 2, 2002

IS THIS OUR LUCKY DAY OR WHAT ?!?!

The US Army Corps of Engineers has called together their key decision makers to spend two days with Small Business.

We will have the chance to be one-on-one with - Division/District Commanders and Deputies for Small Business - to hear first hand what the various commands will be buying. We will also have the opportunity to ask our individual questions and state any concerns.

WHAT IS YOUR PLAN TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS NETWORKING OPPORTUNITY?

WHAT WILL YOU TAKE AWAY ON TUESDAY AFTERNOON?

I am going to talk to you about the art of networking - what it is - what it is not – networking tools and techniques – and – the measure of success in networking.

Most of you in this room have their own definition and approach to “networking”. I hope to provide you food for thought and reminders of what makes networking “work”. I am not an expert. I speak to you from years of application and observation in business development and marketing for DoD. This is networking al la McKnight. You each must develop your own methods and techniques. But there are, I believe basics which we all must remember as we approach networking.

A few minutes ago General Flowers spoke of the Corps positive and proactive approach to support to Small Business. What a great transition to my message today. Before I start - I want to share what I believe are important characteristics of the successful networking.

POSITIVE, PROACTIVE, PERSISTENT, PATIENT

These characteristics will be recurring themes in my presentation this afternoon.

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NETWORKING.....WHAT IS IT?

I just said it was an art. Well, I tend to be dramatic at times. Let's see what you think as we go along.

First Let's talk about what it is not!

It IS NOT

Socializing

Grin-and-grip

A boon-doggle

Press-the-flesh

Nor is it

Chargeable time away from the office to take it easy

Furthermore,

It IS NOT

An effort to see how many business cards you can pass out

Selling

Begging – asking for a Handout

A bi-monthly activity

Instant gratification

I believe

NETWORKING IS – A PROCESS

It is

Organization

Repetition

Practice

Visibility

Evaluation

It is Hard Work!

IS NETWORKING IMPORTANT?

It is vital to every business.

It is a process by which you have unlimited resources at your disposal – access to information and ideas from technical, procurement, and marketing specialists for every aspect of your targeted service areas.

Networking is to not just meeting people and exchanging business cards – that's easy.

It is a purposeful activity to know as many people as possible AND to have them know and recognize you / your company.

WHY??

FOR FUTURE BENEFIT

Yes, for future benefit.

Well this is where that "PATIENT" characteristic comes in.

In all business, you must have REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS.

In the Small Business community this is perhaps even more important. I believe networking provides the information and insight to help Small Business establish realistic expectations.

Let me explain.

As members of the Small Business community, we know that while sole-source set-asides and competitive set-asides are critical to our business environment, we also only have to look at the numbers in this room today – as compared to the Corps first conference six years ago – to know that competition is alive and well – no matter the SB classification.

SB programs may shrink the size of the pond – so to speak – and enable SB to compete on a more level playing field. But in the end, we must PROVE our competence to perform. This is a business and there are no Free Rides.

We must understand our customers and their business.

We must clearly see where we fit in the system.

We must prove our ability to perform.

We must become an "known entity" to our customers.

That brings us right back to Networking.

WHAT IS NETWORKING?

As I said earlier -

It is a PROCESS ---- to keep you in step with your markets and your customers

It is a PROCESS ---- to carry your message to potential clients – not only USACE and other services or agencies – but to Large Businesses and yes, to your “competitors” – other small businesses.

The Networking process enables you, as a representative of your company to:

- Establish contacts
- Develop relationships and
- Collect and exchange information

It is the result of these contacts, relationships, and information that:

- Expands your knowledge base
- Creates and perpetuates your company's image
- Builds your business

What makes the process of Networking successful??

I BELIEVE THERE ARE 4 ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL NETWORKING
I FUTHER BELIEVE THESE ELEMENTS ARE LINKED TO THE 4 P's

#1 Organized approach (PROACTIVE)

- Know where you are going and why
 - o Business/Marketing Plan is your roadmap.
- What do you need to know to get there?
- Do your homework ... do the front-end work – how does this networking opportunity support the plan

(Each customer is different – you cannot cookie-cutter your approach – with the USACE and all customers – you must get to know and understand them – they each have their own personality, so to speak.)

- Plan, Plan, Plan

#2 Common sense, practical routines/habits (PERSISTENT)

- Did you reconfirm the time, location, and directions
- Write down our objectives for the opportunity
- Do you have a list of questions?
- Do you have the answers to the questions you will be asked?
- Have the “tools” you need?? – business cards, writing implement, calendar
- Turn your cell phone off

#3 Apply logical, efficient methods (PATIENT – persevere)

(Must define “patient” – Webster’s first definition is long suffering – that fits our business at times, but I reference the second definition – diligent/consistent – which is my preferred application in my 4 P’s)

- Maintain contacts
- Follow-up system
- Develop client/competitor profiles
- Review/Re-evaluate
- Share/disseminate information

#4 Present a confident attitude (POSITIVE)

- Knowledge is power
- People will be drawn to you

LET TALK ABOUT EACH ELEMENT – WITH SPECIFICS

(1) ORGANIZED APPROACH

- Organization underpins your networking activities – networking is a process
- With your Business/Marketing Plan as your roadmap...
 - Have you thought through your objectives for the opportunity?
 - Have you determined what individual or group you need to seek out?
 - Do you know their general needs? Mission?
- Do you have an action or activity checklist?
I love lists – have them everywhere – make them for everyone – I'll make a few for you!
Lists keep you on track.
- Are you prepared to talk about your company and its relevancy to the theme of the networking opportunity?
- Is your 60-second commercial or your elevator speech ready to go?

PROACTIVE
Churning and Burning!

(2) COMMON SENSE, PRACTICAL ROUTINES and HABITS

We talked about really basic common sense items a few minutes ago – knowing the location of the networking opportunity, having the correct directions – you know be able to show up!

Developing a practical routine or habits does help. It puts the does and don't on auto control. You are applying discipline to your process.

- Have the “tools” you need – business cards, writing implement, calendar
 - Card and Pocket system – ladies – have pockets
 - Notes on cards
 - Takes breaks to expand card notes
- Turn that cell phone off!
You owe your customer your attention – you want theirs, right?
- Do you have a list of attendees
 - Have you ID'd those you need to see?
 - Do the right people know you will be there?
- Act like the “host” – do not wait for introductions – be proactive
- Ask the “5-W's” -- who, what, where, when, why
 - Listen versus “selling and telling” - they will remember you
 - when you are asked – be concise; Do not ramble about what you do
- Can you be a resource? Can you make a referral?
- Do not hang with buddies - obvious tight-knit groups send a “do not disturb” signal – you do not want to ward off new contacts
- Follow-up with the people you make contact with

PERSISTENT

(3) APPLY LOGICAL, EFFICIENT METHODS

What do you do with all the information you collect?

You have to find the best methods for you – but you have to find them! Whatever you do, it must be reasonable and easy for you.

What do you need?

- Method to organize your contacts for easy reference
 - Electronic wonderland - Outlook
 - Catalogue companies/people
- System to follow-up, maintain contact
 - When do you need to contact them again?
 - Track linkages to opportunities and customers
- Tickler System (best linked to your task/calendar)
 - Historical record of contacts
 - Upcoming Bids / Bid Results
 - Future networking opportunities
- Develop client/competitor profiles
 - Clients
 - Mission objectives – future projections
 - Key contact list for your focus area
 - Procurement history/planned
 - Preferred contractors – who's been winning and why
 - Competitors
 - Services
 - Key customers
- Review/Re-evaluate – Where are you? Where is your customer?
Remember – NOTHING stays the same! Funding, politics, staffing – all impact our customers and our work. It is up to us to know what's what and who is who!
- Share/disseminate information within your own company
Critical to growing the company – staff and management must be in lockstep in goals and objectives

Why do you need these methods? It's amazing what smart people can forget in 6 weeks.

PATIENT or PERSEVER
(diligent, consistent)

(4) PRESENT A CONFIDENT ATTITUDE

- Being prepared breeds confidence
- Knowledge is power
- Knowing the big picture greatly influences the small successes

POSITIVE

WHAT IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES?

Professional Organizations
Business Activities
Civic Groups

How to decide what organization?
Where are your customers?
What fits your interest, your company's goals?

ENGAGE

You have to do more than sign up!
What better way to be known than working on committees and workgroups with exposure to markets you are pursuing.

Whatever you do, it has to fit you and your company.

Over the years I have had several rewarding affiliations – all cited in my bio in your program. These organizations have been the cornerstone of my networking process.

- Society of American Military Engineers (SAME)
- National Contracts Management Association (NCMA)
- Women in Defense (WID)
- Regional/Local engineering and environmental associations and civic organizations such as Rotary International.

As I said, you must determine what works for you. Let me share my reasoning in involvement in SAME. I do believe that SAME offers the ultimate networking opportunity for anyone involved in DoD work.

- Supports the engineering/environmental markets my company pursues
- Provided military and private sector contacts – literally, worldwide
- Offers regional and national conferences that I can attend with my customers and I have the opportunity to participate in the planning and execution of these conferences
- Offers opportunities to be involved in committees focused on a wide variety of industry issues – readiness, environmental affairs, knowledge management, and force protection
- Satisfying to me personally in that I may contribute in some small way to my country through my work

These organizations work for me. Your choices must be a well thought-out. They must support your professional and personal objectives. It is very hard to commit energy and time to something you do not believe in or have “fire in the belly” about. Its more than the check at then end of the month!

The people you are involved with are watching you and getting to know you ... make it be a positive encounter.

REMEMBER – YOU ARE ALWAYS NETWORKING!

As I prepare to close, I want to ask you to have an
OUT OF BODY EXPERIENCE.

Actually, I want you to practice this and add it to your common sense and practical routines.

Put yourself in your customer's shoes – I note that in order to do this little exercise you have to have gone through the 4 elements I have been talking about – you have to be informed – you have to KNOW your customer.

- What is their mind set?
- What's on their plate?
- What can you do to ensure a positive encounter?

For us today – this is pretty straight forward.

General Flowers laid out the USACE objectives and he and his team from around the world are here to talk to us and with us about opportunities and mission objectives.

All networking settings are not as well defined or as amenable.

With the 4 elements of successful networking AND the 4 P's in mind, I suggest that you follow 2 very simple rules.

First – Use good manners and common sense in your networking activities.

Second - Treat your customers as you would like to be treated.

- Be attentive (LISTEN)
- Be considerate of their time (Their only job is NOT to talk to SB)
- Be concise (Be sure there is no opportunity to miss your points in babble)
- Be informed (Do your homework on your customer)

Okay – let me wrap this up!

TO CLOSE, I WANT TO GO BACK OVER THE
4 P'S AND HIGHLIGHT THE 4 ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS IN NETWORK

Proactive / Have an organized approach

- Engage - Get involved
- Set goals – Make a Plan and Work it
- Be a resource – be remembered
- Understand your clients and your competition

Persistent / Develop common sense routines/habits

- Be disciplined and organized
- Be committed to your Plan
- Go back to your customer – ask what they need
- Evaluate and re-evaluation where you are

Patient / Apply logical, effective methods to manage the information you collect

- Investment of time, energy in your methods/systems
- Remember memory is not your best source to review and evaluate
- Have realistic expectations
- Remember – few if any “instant” rewards

Positive / Present a confident attitude

- You will get out of Networking what you put into it .. find the nugget!
- Be Prepared! Be Confident!
- Look at the big picture – understand the system, the customer, and work – and what you bring to the party

Your program stated I was going TO TELL YOU HOW TO GET THE MOST OF
OUT OF THE NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES AT THIS CONFERENCE.

What I offer to for this evening and tomorrow:

- Listen
- Think about what you need to know and make a list of questions
- Be concise in your questions AND in your answers
- Get to know as many people as you can
- Go back to your office and spend time “thinking” and analyzing what you will learn here
- FOLLOW-UP

I hope I have given you a “nugget” or at least resurrected forgotten networking tools. Networking is not socializing – it is hard work. But it is rewarding and it is fun. I personally believe you shouldn't do anything that isn't fun!!

One last thought. I had a very smart man share his philosophy on how to make networking activities routine in his work – he was speaking of the investigation, the homework, the follow-up – he said ...

REMEMBER, Linda,
YOU CAN MAKE EXCUSES OR YOU CAN MAKE MONEY
YOU CANNOT MAKE BOTH

I know what I want to do!

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO?

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today. Thank you for your attention. I hope each of you has found a “nugget” in something that has been said.

ENGAGE
BE FEARLESS
ENJOY
NETWORK!!!